

I HATE BEING A Jew

I'm a Jew. I hate being one. I'm so Jewish, I even hate my self-hatred. I even hate the fact that I'm telling you this, and I hate myself for feeling that way. I feel like vomiting blood whenever I ponder my wretched status as a daughter of Judah.

My family, a pathetic lost tribe living on the tip of Coney Island, was stereotypically Jewish. Their outlook on life was about as sunny as a piece of shit floating down a gutter in a November rain. Their misery swallowed them up like the Red Sea engulfed the Egyptians.

If my family were God's chosen people, they didn't seem very happy about it. Our house was like a morgue. Inside, it was as cold and painful as an arctic wind blowing on a toothache. It smelled like moldy pickles mixed in embalming fluid. My family moped around in their self-styled concentration camp. I don't remember laughter. I recall walking stiffies who never smiled. Even on holidays, it felt like someone had just died. The menorah was always half-unlit, never half-lit. DOOM.

My kinfolk were so hung up about things

going right, they made everything wrong. Even when I swore that things were fine, they'd skip right over it in their quest to unearth some possible calamity. If I bit into a piece of candy, they warned about cavities. If I had a pimple, they thought it was cancer. If I had my period, they were sure it was hemophilia. If my lips were chapped, they diagnosed leprosy.

Oy vey! My family members were only happy when they were unhappy. Breathing, sleeping, and eating, they suffered. They were experts at pointing out the worst that could happen. They were convinced they'd get screwed no matter what they did. They couldn't conceive of being anything but the victim. They specialized in finding problems. If someone complimented them, they were suspicious. If I bought something, they bitched about the price. If a check came in the mail, they worried about taxes. Where I saw opportunity, they perceived threats. If I planned a vacation, they were certain I'd get mugged. If I got a new pet, they'd say it carried diseases. If I said I liked something, they didn't.

They wouldn't dare leave anything to chance. They scurried around like kosher squirrels storing their nuts for the next Holocaust. They stockpiled toilet paper, toothpaste, and Q-Tips. Night tables were crammed with lotions, ointments, tubes, inhalers, pills, and decongestants. Yet with all these medications, they were still sick in the head. They longed for so much security, they might as well have lived in a casket.

My father was a weak shell of a man chained to his parents like a Hebrew slave. He belted out his bitter pain by singing in Catskills talent contests, sounding like a





My daughter,
why does she
say such things?
She'll kvetch to
total strangers,
but do I get so
much as a
postcard?

broken motel-room heater. The whole audience snickered at him, including us. My mother was no better, though. She slammed doors on all my boyfriends, went through all my drawers, opened all my mail, and eavesdropped on all my phone conversations. My brother ran around like Jerry Lewis with one pant leg longer than the other, begging my parents for advice. My three uncles sat in the kitchen without their dentures, moaning about blood pressure and asthma.

When they ate, they emitted snorts and grunts not worthy of swine. They grabbed at food in a completely crass fashion. They gobbled with their mouths open, yapping while chewing. Pieces of grub got spit out and landed on the tablecloth in crude lumps. Gravy dribbled from their jowls down onto their pants in one ugly stream. When they finished, the slobs would lift their plates and lick them clean.

Then, out of nowhere, these demented sons of Abraham would throw knickknacks off the mantelpiece, scream until the veins in their necks popped out, and tear open their shirts in self-pitying agony.

The relatives were just as bad. These two-faced gossips would drop by uninvited, poking their big noses up my ass to uncover my darkest secrets. They all looked the same: potato-shaped bodies, wrinkled grimaces of pain, and stooped posture. Their physiques were molded in the same depressed shape as their emotions.

And then came the moment that they had spent their lives rehearsing for: death. Cancer finally struck my mother. It didn't take the old man long to marry a Russian battle-axe fresh off the boat. She's his fat little *bubeleh*. She loves to hear him kvetch. She loves to take his money. I guess papa found a new family, one more Jewish than me. I fantasize about dressing up like an SS officer and visiting him on Passover to slaughter him like the sacrificial lamb he always dreamed of being. I'll force-feed him my shit like it's a matzo dumpling!

My Jewish family is thankfully almost all dead now. Unfortunately, they had the last laugh. They succeeded in making me miserable. That cloud of gloom hangs over me like nuclear winter. I seldom smile. It takes a lot to make me laugh. I'm in a constant state of apprehension. I focus on the negative. If twenty good things happen, I'll dwell on one mishap. I expect to hear only bad news. I can't handle crisis situations. I look for the worst in people and easily find it. When someone sends me a greeting card, I'll turn it over to check the price. I'm always counting my money. People tell me that I look sad, as if something devastating happened. I wear three thousand years of persecution on my face. Just by being around those nerve-wracking mental leeches and their maddening behavior, an invisible Star of David has been branded on my forehead.

I wish my family had lived next to the Hitlers. At least the Nazis knew how to dress and how to turn their anger outward. I wish there was a perfume I could sprinkle on myself to mask the Hebraic stench. I even have a name for it: Final Solution. But the oppressive smell won't go away until I'm stone-cold dead, a lifeless Jewess in my own private Auschwitz. ■